

## Thriller Night by clandestineClairvoyant

**Series:** [Strut on a line, it's discord and rhyme \[1\]](#)

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** AU from S1E8 because Steve's a werewolf, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Alternate Universe - Werewolf, Blood and Gore, Canon-Typical Violence, F/M, Gen, Multi, Other

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Shady government officials, Steve Harrington, eleven's never seen a dog in her life, monster fights - Character

**Relationships:** Some OT3 undertones I don't know where this is going yet but it's looking that way, Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, eventual harringrove in the series, lowkey sexually confused Steve Harrington

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**Summary:**

Steve's mother turns away from the road in front of them long enough to look at him in the rearview mirror, her hair sleek and immobile in a bun, shining in the shafts of afternoon sun stabbing through the spotlessly clean windows. Her mouth is thinned, and she turns back to the road after getting her fill of glaring sternly at him, shaking her head. "I don't know what your *father* might think, but I doubt he's going to be okay with you *biting* to solve your problems."

# 1. Chapter 1

## Author's Note:

This started as me feverishly thinking of a vampire! Billy/werewolf! Steve au, and then turned into thinking, wow shit would have gone down *very* differently if Steve had been a werewolf. Like, canon divergence different.

And in order to write the story I *wanted* to, I wrote almost 20k words of this. And hey, I know I have a habit and need an intervention, but I actually finished writing this for the most part, give or take some editing! This won't be a permanently hiatus work to loom over me. But hopefully will be part of a series, because I love werewolves and vampires and monsters.

#####

“We don’t *bite*.”

Steve stares out the window, and feels hot and itchy in his sweater, fists curled up in his sleeves and legs drawn up around his seatbelt, knees to his chest. It hurts his stomach, having the belt pulled tight, but he doesn’t mind. Sniffs, and keeps staring out the window, giving small sad looks to his mom.

She’s tense, driving him home from a playdate with Richard Hammond cut short early, her knuckles white on the steering wheel and still smelling of her work perfume. It clouds the car, and Steve *hates* it. “What would make you do that? Do you think it’s *okay*? Is that how we’re going to solve problems now?” The blinker goes on, and they turn, the light moving to glare in through Steve’s window now. It’s warm, and he feels even stuffier than before, dazzled by the

glare off of the shop fronts, the window dusty with tree pollen.  
“God.”

She turns away from the road in front of them long enough to look at him in the rearview mirror, her hair sleek and immobile in a bun, shining in the shafts of afternoon sun stabbing through the spotlessly clean windows. Her mouth is thinned, and she turns back to the road after getting her fill of glaring sternly at him, shaking her head. “I don’t know what your *father* might think, but I doubt he’s going to be okay with you *biting* to solve your problems.”

A long pause, and then she snaps when there’s no more response but a sulky slouch in the back seat. “*Steven.*”

Steve sniffs heavily, wipes his nose on the sleeve of his puffy sweater. “M’sorry.” He mumbles.

“I should *hope* so. I’m going to have to smooth things over with Linda now.” Mrs.Harrington shakes her head again, and once more Steve marvels at how her hair stays so perfect, when she doesn’t do anything but shake her head at him. She sighs, heavy, as they come to a slow stop at a street light. Her hand comes off the steering wheel long enough to rest her head in it, eyes closing nails a perfect deep maroon to match her lipstick.

Quieter now, she says, “Steven. I don’t want to bring you back to the therapist. We just don’t have the *time.*”

Steve doesn’t say anything, all of six years old and confused enough that he feels like he wants to cry. His mouth is still thick feeling, coppery still.

One minute he’d been fine, laughing at something Richard said while Dynamutt raced after Scooby-Doo on the flickering television screen behind them, legos spread across the parlor carpet.

The next, Richard had been too rough, had knocked him over because he’d wanted something on the other side of Steve-

The other boy always been bigger, and prone to carelessness, almost rude-

And then Richard was crying, and Steve had a mouthful of blood and his heart was thundering so hard in his ears he couldn't hear the metallic sound effect rattle of Scooby's knees knocking together on the TV behind them; Couldn't hear Linda Hammond rush in to find what her son was screaming about, face paling.

And then Steve had been scared too, seeing an adult look at him like that, seeing Richard on the ground, curled up away from him and holding his bleeding arm. So he'd started crying too, even though he was a big kid now, and his Dad said he couldn't cry when he got scared any more.

Now, he's just tired. His eyes are hot and itchy, but he's limp as a dishrag, staring down at the mix of red smears and dried white snot on his sleeve. Outside the car it's cool, the beginning of spring. But inside he feels too hot, the sweater suddenly stifling and his seatbelt choking him.

"M'sorry." He says again, but it's so quiet he doesn't know if his Mom even hears.

She stays still, holding her head in one hand, even as the light turns green.

#####

Leading up to... Everything, Steve had been restless.

Nights before the party he'd been pacing his backyard like a lion in a zoo, smoking as many menthols as he dared to sneak from his mom's purse and wearing a line in the pristine trimmed lawn surrounding the heated pool. When his sneakers got too wet, he switched to

pavement, squelching cold across the patio. Vapor obscured the surface of the water, the night turning cold with the first bite of winter and crisping the leaves under his feet the lawn guy hadn't got around to raking up.

He felt crazy, wound up; the thrumming in his blood making him tap his fingers absently on the legs of his jeans, sucking down the last of his cigarette and sticking it into the empty beer bottle he'd left on the arm of the pool chair. His parents weren't home this week.

It was almost half full by Tuesday.

Something felt wrong.

Something had *been* feeling wrong, since September, and he couldn't fucking stand waiting for it to go away. He was all worked up, some scent he couldn't place making his teeth feel heavy, and his palms itch. Something hanging around the house. Something that he got a heavy draught of when he rolled the windows of the BMW down, whipping his hair and sending him grinding his teeth and slowing on main street, easing into a wary crawl, until there were cars honking at him in his BMW.

He'd been restless before, to the point where his mom made noise about a therapist, about medication. But his dad had made some noises about teenagers and small towns, and blown it off. Thank fuck. But this was new, even for him. He felt *manic*.

He walked main street, and the side streets too, sneakers crunching through leaves and cold on the cuffed ankle where he'd started to slightly out grow his favorite pair of worn Levi's. He wanted to smoke more, wanted something to do with his hands when people looked curiously at him.

(But that was something he had to do at home, because his parents would never be there long enough to find out.)

He slogged across the corn fields, through the stabbing sharp field of wheat chaff that was littered with crows, who remained strangely silent and watchful while he crunched across the field, furtive, half sure the farmer was going to come out and blow his fucking head off.

They barely flinched when he got close, looking with beady eyes, and he didn't bother shooing them away.

Steve ended up at the quarry most weekends, sometimes with Tommy, sometimes without. Kicking rocks in from the top, and looking down the long vertical cliff, gray clouds scudding across the sky so low they looked like they'd clip his head when they passed over, turning the smooth still water below as cold and flat looking as concrete.

No matter what, he always ended up in the same place. Even when he started all the way across town, his backyard, the high school; Somehow he always ended up near the lab on the edge of town. Something in there making his teeth hum, making him growl.

Making him scared.

He barely even wanted Carol and Tommy around, something about them grating on his nerves. But at the same time he felt nervous enough that he *needed* to surround himself with people, needed company. Tommy was good for that at least, stupidly loyal in a way that made Steve content. Carol was ruthlessly sharp and to the point, with an edge of cruelty Steve couldn't force himself to bear sometimes. He needed that, needed both of them since they'd all linked up in middle school like magnets.

Needed them a little less now, that he was stepping out with Nancy.

Jesus, he had it bad for Nancy Wheeler.

Something about her smell, something about the way she talked, made him crazy. Something about how she had a habit of laying a hand on her own shoulder, right over where her collar bone would be under her lavender cashmere sweater, made something in his spine go loose and soft. And when she got in the habit of touching *him*, laying a hand on his neck, in his hair, palm cool and dry? He was helpless. He turned into putty, and she'd laugh and scratch through his hair and call him *kitten*, quiet so the fucking wonder twins wouldn't give him shit about it. He couldn't keep his hands off of her.

They still gave him shit.

Made comments about following her like a dog; All panting and hopeful, helping her study, carrying her books. They sort of had something, he thought, as he invited her over to his house to drink some beers, even letting her bring the old ball and chain, Barbara. Anything to be near her. To see her by the turquoise wavering of light from the pool, sitting in the same pool chair he'd lay in when he couldn't sleep, and smiling shyly at him-

While Carol and Tommy acted like trash cans, and Barbara sat all silent and uncomfortable.

God, he just dug her.

He liked touching her hair, thick and soft and smelling like clean shampoo without the harsh chemicals of hairspray, or burnt smell of curling irons. Liked to nose along the soft nape of her neck that had little soft ringlets of hair above her collar and make her giggle. Liked the smell under her ear. He wanted to smell everything else about her, the dip of her chest, her belly button, the pulse at her wrist where the veins were thin and blue. He wanted to wrap himself in Nancy Wheeler and see if it did anything to keep him from pacing out in his yard until two in the fucking morning, aching with indecision and anxiety and shredding his bed sheet like he was six all over again.

At the party he finally got to. Her breath smelled like beer, and like mint from her toothpaste. But most importantly, she smelled like Steve; in Steve's sheets, smiling up at him, her heart hammering loud in his ears when she took her shirt off and sweat beading in the dip of her throat, the hair at her temples.

It made him crazy, made him bury his face in her neck and breathe deep, made him cool after what felt like weeks of wandering and running hot, when she laughed and he felt it shake through his chest where it pressed against hers. He liked her voice, and he liked how she studied, and how she complained about her parents, and was super into scary movies despite the fact that she jumped like crazy.

He was scared, and more confused than he'd been since he was little, and didn't know why. Couldn't figure it out, and didn't *want* to figure it out.

But she made him calm.

#####

Jonathan Byers beat his fucking head in, and chipped his tooth.

Steve Harrington won fights, as a general rule. He didn't give until someone was on the ground, and it was never him.

But apparently psycho Jonathan Byers is the goddamn exception. *Apparently*, a missing little brother would do that to you, he thinks blearily, caught by surprise, feeling blood burst from his nose like a fucking fountain. *Apparently*, and perhaps obviously, *talking shit* about



someone's dead little brother two days after the funeral was a small step too far.

... Big step too far.

Steve's man enough to own up to that. Therapy had done one thing for him; He was the most self aware goddamn teenager in all Indiana.

He knew if they were alone- if Steve weren't a fucking coward- if he weren't trying to be *normal*- if if if. He could've torn Byers up like wet tissue paper. Could've gotten his teeth in him and tore him up like he hadn't *ever* done to a person before. Could've made confetti out of fucking Jonathan Byers, who'd wrapped himself in Nancy, and even now smells like her clean shampoo hair, and her lavender sweater, and the yellow comforter with the little flowers, while he gets a fist in Steve's collar and breaks a knuckle on his face.

He hears the cartilage pop as much as feels it. Doesn't stop him, and Steve's almost impressed.

He gets his own punch in, nails cutting into his palm and drawing more blood from himself than he does from Byers face, snarling and trying to keep his teeth a normal length for a pissed off teenage boy. But Byers barely rocks back, heavy on him and snarling even worse, blood in his teeth.

Jesus, he's a scary mother fucker.

He almost went in, when he'd seen them together. He almost broke the fucking window, nails digging deep furrows in the wood as he let himself back down onto the roof tiles, heart pounding so hard in his chest that he tasted blood in his mouth, cloying over the smell of Mrs. Byers hydrangeas.

But he hadn't. Because Steve was *always* trying to be fucking normal, and normal boyfriends didn't go in and twist someone's head off at eleven 'o'clock at night with their bare hands.

So he'd spit the blood out of his mouth, and stalked away.

And now; Here's the thing about Steve Harrington.

He knows he's not like his parents. He knows he's not like any of the kids at school, because he smells so different from them. Knows because he can *smell* how he's so different from them. What kid had a sense of smell so sharp he could tell which teacher had a blow habit by the dust under their fingernails? He could tell when their cat Minnie was going to die a month before she did, his little five year old hands petting her all gentle over where he knew she had sickness inside her, giving his Mom hysterics.

And he can still smell that thing on Nancy, like a sickness.

She'd showered, he can smell that too, like a *creep*. Byers hadn't, and his hands smell like the inside of a dying thing, something that had been out so long it had putrefied in the rain. Except worse, because it didn't smell *natural*. He smells like the woods, and Nancy's blankets, and he smells like he'd put his hands in something that made Steve want to *ralph*.

Under her clean smell, Nancy smells like death, and it makes Steve want to shake out of his skin as the cops pull up with the *whoop whoop* flash of lights. The sound and pump of fear makes him finally bare a tooth in a snarl and shove up at Byers, who'd touched her with his death stained hands.

He's scared now. Confused. He sort of misses wandering lost around town.

Byers punches him one more time, and then pops the cop for good measure, which is actually pretty funny when Steve blinks the stars from his eyes long enough to see it. Grit sticks to his hands when he pushes himself up, tacky with blood in four little divots on the palm. His nose is throbbing, jaw aching, and the cops so busy getting Byers

wrangled he doesn't notice Steve scrambling for freedom.

Steve's pulled the rest of the way up by Tommy, and the two of them stagger together almost knocking heads, Steve blinking blood from his eyes and grabbing his jaw in a vice grip that's too sharp, that he curls in so Tommy won't notice. Nancy's moaning, hands fluttering around her face and eyes wide and horrified as she watches Byers get slammed onto the police car, grunting in pain and still running so hot Steve can smell him, feverishly pissed off.

Steve can smell her fear too. The whole alley reeks, and it makes him sick enough to gag him as he takes off with Tommy, pulling ahead of the cop who Byer's had hit who's already panting, rasping like he's got asthma or some shit before he even reaches the corner they're tearing around.

Steve's skin crawls, so he shrugs Tommy off, and outpaces him.

He's always been faster. And when he takes the lead, it feels good.

#####

He gets drunk.

It's not *hard*. His dad has enough booze in the house to sink the Titanic, and there's so little traffic in fucking Hawkins Indiana that it's a joke to drive. Nobody goes out past ten o'clock, and Steve has the endless black side roads to himself, nerves thrumming and booze barely making a dent in the tap of his fingers, the way he shakes his leg and grinds his teeth.

The cops speed traps have been in the same spots since '76, the only

wildcard being fucking Hopper in his big nasty Blazer, catching teens necking like a chain smoking ghost.

The radio blares out some stupid funky Bowie shit, stripes of light moving across his white knuckled hands, and up his forearms to the cuffed sleeves of his shirt as his car moves over the pavement with a quiet hush. His face hurts, and he's smoked all of his cigarettes on the drive; The last of a crumpled, stale pack of camels Tommy had left in his car a week ago. Ungrateful little shit.

So. He's drunk, and driving out to the wrong side of the fucking tracks, to have a talk with Jonathan Byers.

Because, here's the thing.

He puts on a brave face for his mom. He acts normal for his dad, and he purrs for Nancy like a little kitten and carries her books and smells her hair and makes a fucking embarrassment of himself.

But he kind of wants to be better than just. *Faking.*

He doesn't want to bite Richard Hammond. He doesn't *want* to keep himself from stoving in Kyle Somner's face at basketball practice because the dickhead tripped him. He doesn't want to sniff out the deer who come and harass the bird feeder in his backyard and have his mouth water; Doesn't want to moon around the south corridor at school because Nancy had a hissy fit there half an hour ago and it still smells like her all worked up.

He doesn't want to wake up in the middle of the night for a midnight snack and finish *half a pound of raw hamburger* before he stops himself out of shock.

He wants to be normal, he wants to get his fucking head kicked in by a girl for being a dumbass. Wants to moon after a crush without that hard edge of something bloody in his gut, to bring her flowers, and go *aw shucks* on her doorstep, and apologize and get her to put her hand on his cheek again because he's a hopeless fucking goon.

So here he is, practically the middle of the fucking night, going to apologize to Jonathan fucking Byers. Because he wants to be a good person.

He should be apologizing to Nancy, he knows. But he talked some shit about Byers dead kid brother that makes him feel pretty bad, and he thinks apologizing to him would be a good baby step towards having Nancy forgive him. She likes Byers, for some reason. Even before everything got all weird, she'd stood up for him when Tommy and Carol (and yeah, Steve too) were being dick heads.

She was sweet like that. It made him feel pretty awful all over again, thinking about it.

Maybe she put her hand on Byers face too. Maybe she called him *kitten*-

No, no, *fuck*. Shut up. Apologize.

Jesus. He's such a baby. He reaches for a cigarette, before remembering he's out, and thumping a fist on the center console in annoyance instead. He almost veers too close to the roadside, and jerks the wheel back, scowling and pushing his hair back out of his eyes with a free hand.

It's dark out. The streetlight out front of the Byers flickers like a horror movie when he pulls up, and Steve shudders, still all strung out from weeks of sleepless nights, eyes gritty and skin tight. The woods stretch around the house, the nearest neighbor almost a quarter mile away and the trees black and featureless on the cloudy

night. It sends shivers up his back, strange and exciting whether from fear, or of the night air he can smell through the window, Steve's not sure.

He's drunk, and as he gets out and slams the car door, he realizes he's kind of more buzzed than he thought. Kind of dizzy, as he yanks his keys out of the ignition. Kind of off-kilter, as he focuses on the gravel walkway up to the Byers family porch, brow furrowed and scowling out at the night and trying to shake the shivers off.

And he's buzzed enough to barely think about it, as he starts to hammer on the Byers door, shoulder pressed hard against splintered wood and eyes screwed shut.

"Jonathan?" He yells, head hung low, scowling at the Byers creaky porch. "Are you there man?I- It's Steve!" He tilts his head forward, and feels as it slowly comes to rest on the Byers shitty fucking front door, probably getting peeling yellow paint chips in his hair. He's tired, and drunk, and the weight of the woods pressing behind him is making him nervous, so he groans and rolls his head against the door. "I just want to talk!" He finishes, and hammers another few times for good measure. Fuck, he's going to apologize so good Byers is going to have a *coronary*.

But it's not Byers who answers, leaving his fist hanging mid knock. It's Nancy.

Her dark moon eyes peer through the door, a wing of hair falling across her face and Steve wonders blearily if he's drunker than he thought. But he blinks, and she's still there.

"Steve." She says, and the stern serious tone of her voice brings him to heel like a dog, zero to sixty in a split of a second. He feels like panting, and lets himself go limp against the door frame, grinning faintly, although it doesn't do anything for Nancy's mood. He can

tell.

“You need to *leave*.” She says, and for a moment, he pulls away. He sways in place, confused, like he’s going to stagger home by himself without even talking to Nancy, because she *said* so.

But then he gets a hold of himself, and scowls, pushing at the door. She doesn’t move, and Steve resists the urge to reduce it to splinters. Calm. *Calm*. “No, wait, *listen*, I’m not trying to start anything-” He insists, nails digging into the door like they did the other night to her window sill, leaving furrows, his face throbbing and his chest tightening when he smells Byers being an anxious fuckwit behind her.

The good thing about this whole cute little love triangle they got going on right now, is that Steve’s all torn up about something besides the unnamed thing that’s been making him crazy for a month now. Too hard to be scared, he tells himself, when you’re crazy about a girl. Crazy about a boy too.

Crazy about wanting to punch him in the face.

“I don’t care!” Nancy snaps, looking tired, and frazzled. Scared. She has dark rings under her eyes, and a smattering of pimples right under her jaw that she didn’t have a few days ago.

It looks like the last shower she had was the one he smelled on her, and her hair is flyaway, held back in a messy ponytail. She smells like cigarette smoke from the Byers house, and sharp cheap soap. But under it all she smells like Jonathan, and it makes him so fucking miserable he wants to puke.

He’s distracted enough, and dazed enough, that he almost doesn’t register when she yells, “I don’t *care*, you need to leave!”

“No, listen, I- I need-” He’s so fucking worked up. This is so stupid; He’d driven all over town *twice* just working up the courage to come out here, and now he was. Here he was, swallowing that hot pit of anger and pride that made him such a little prick, and apologize for his stupid fucking stunt and hoping-

Well. If Nancy wouldn't take him back, he'd be okay just being able to be near her. Be her friend again. Just smelling her made him calm.

And that would be fine. More than fine.

"I *messed up*, okay? I messed up. Please." He's fucking up the Byers door with his nails, and Jonathan looks like a fucking ghost in the door-crack view of his shitty living room, all pale with his eyes all washed out under his heavy brow. The lighting situation needs some fucking supervision, because it looks like a haunted house in there from what Steve can see. "Let me make things right. Please?"

She looks at him with bright eyes, smelling like cashmere, and Jonathan and-

Something makes his head rush. Anger, probably. "What's on your hand?"

Nancy jerks her hand down behind the door, looking caught, and Steve goes blank. She looks guilty, and she smells scared. God, he hates the smell of people being scared.

He goes blank. "Is that blood?" It's blood, he can smell it, why the fuck is he asking. "What's going on?"

He meets Byers eyes through the door. Wide set, dark eyes. Broad face and a sharp small nose. At this moment, Steve fucking hates him. "Did he do this to you?"

"No! Steve-"

But he's already pushing his way in, and now that he's not *calm*, now that he's not being *normal*, it's as easy to push the door open against Nancy as it is to kick dirt off of his shoes. She staggers back, and he moves forward, snarling, eyes on Byers.

And stops like an idiot in the middle of the Byers shitty seventies shag living room.



Okay. So he knew the Byers were crazy.

Their mom, screaming on main street and insisting her dead boy in the coroners office was still alive. Jonathan, beating Steve's fucking face in with that flat reflective look on his face. A deadbeat dad, the little kid who played that weird little dragon game with Nancy's nerd little brother. The Byers were a fucking pinata full of neuroses that got smacked with the hammer of tragedy, and Steve was standing in the middle of their living room.

Lights stretched in crazy arcs over the cute little wallpaper print walls, a little browned with cigarette smoke and dingy with the wear and tear of a family with two boys living in it. The rest of their lights were dimmed like someone's serial killer basement, the heavy smell of a grief and gasoline permeating the air. Jonathan's hand was stained red as well, gripped tight into a fist, and Steve reeled in confusion, even as Byers lunged forward to grab his shirt collar with the bandaged hand, that familiar flat and serious look on his face as he started bodily hauling him back towards the front door.

Steve digs his heels in, because like *fuck*. "Wh-" He started, wrinkling his nose, and gagging faintly.

"You need to leave." Byers was saying, still stretching his shirt towards the door, and Steve was confused enough to start going again, fumbling at where Byers was gripping at his shirt. "I'm not asking you, I'm *telling* you, get out of here-"

"What's that smell? Is that *gasoline*?" Steve has a bewildering, paranoid thought. His neck's creeping in that weird way, and Byers is pawing at him, and Nancy's freaking out- "Is this a joke?!"

He wrenches himself out of Byers grip, and spins, dodging another grab, ready to start freaking out.

But as Steve turns ready to start picking Byers up and bouncing his head off the floor-

He's looking down the barrel of a gun.

Steve lives in Hawkins Indiana. He knows what a fucking thirty eight looks like.

"You have five seconds."

His hands come up, and he blinks down at Nancy, Jonathan making a shocked sounding mutter behind him, but not protesting as much as Steve feels he should be under the circumstances.

Steve has never heard Nancy sound like this before. She sounds cold, serious. Her face is completely still, a small wrinkle he's never noticed before deepening in the corner of her mouth as she cocks the hammer, and Steve yelps in genuine fear.

But he can smell blood, gunpowder, and gasoline that's making him gag, and that hair-raising smell that's had him walking all over town like a cat in heat, growling at headlights and shuffling through five fucking miles of forest. It's growing stronger, like Steve being scared is calling it. But he knows it's in his head. It's always been in his head. There's nothing to be scared of but Nancy Wheeler, the love of his goddamn life, pointing a fucking .38 at him.

"I'm doing this for you."

"What the *fuck* is going on?" Steve asks in sincere and genuine bewilderment, hurt making his gut clench, and fear making his chest stutter and start like an engine turning over. His nails have been long since he made a mess out of the front door, and now when he curls them up they cut into his palm, almost right into the little crescents he'd made before. When he'd punched Byers in the face.

Byers throws him a startled look, and Steve thinks he may notice the blood on his hand, the rumbling, and he's trying to be normal- But he's also trying not to get *shot by his girlfriend*.

"Five."

"Nancy-" Says Byers uncertainly, and Steve feels a vibration in his feet that he thinks may be his heart beat, as he stares down the barrel of Nancy's gun, frozen so hard it hurts.

"Four." The barrel only moves the slightest when Nancy takes a step to the side, and Steve notices the lights are flickering like crazy, as he takes a step to the side of his own, not letting himself be herded, lowering himself and shaking his head. Byers is looking around wildly, spinning in place like a psycho to look at the christmas lights, and Steve would be too, but he's busy looking at Nancy and feeling his heart break.

"Nancy!" Byer's yells.

"Three." Nancy says, and even though she looks as dead serious, Steve can see her eyes all shiny and brown. She looks a little like crying.

"Hey hey hey, no, *no no*-" He is *not being shot in Jonathan Byers living room*, that is not something that's happening tonight, this is what he gets for trying to be a good person-

"Two."

Nancy steps closer.

"*Nancy!*" Byers hollers, and finally Nancy jerks like she's been goosed, looking around all crazy as the electricity in the walls sizzles like someone put a fork in the socket. "*The lights.*" He says, *like the two of them don't have god damn eyes and can't see them going on and off like a fucking disco club.*

"*It's here.*" Byers breathes, and lunges all crazy across the living room to scoop the meanest looking baseball bat Steve has ever seen off of their coffee table, sitting ready among a slew of of Lifetime magazines and shitty crayon drawings on notebook paper. The papers go fluttering to the floor, and Steve dazedly catches sight of red crayon like fire, dragons, or green wizards framed by the tattered edge of notebook paper ripped out of a spiral notebook. The bat has nails hammered through it like something from a zombie movie, all sweet cedar and cold iron, and Steve jerks back like Byers is going to go at him with it. Because for all he

*knows, he might. Crazy motherfucker.*

*But no; Byers just puts his back to Nancy's, barely looking at Steve and clenching a hand so hard on the bat that Steve smells a fresh rush of blood.*

*"Wait, what?"*

*"Where is it?" Nancy spins, and the lights are almost bouncing, making Steve motion sick, and he's screaming, "Whoa, whoa, whoa," because the gun is suddenly being gestured wildly around the room, following Nancy's gaze as she darts from corner to corner with the muzzle.*

*"Where's what?" He squeaks.*

*The ceiling caves in in the corner.*

*Dust and plaster fall down, the roof pulsing like a beating heart as something pounds its way through. Crunching and banging, and something drops down in a cloud of white and splinters of ceiling, the lights blaring like police lights and flashing drunkenly with audible ticking.*

*Steve smells death, and he's screaming, and Byers is dragging him down the hall and screaming his fucking head off too, because a monster just dropped out of the ceiling, and Nancy is shooting it with her gun.*

*The noise makes Steve sick to his stomach, ears ringing and a physical shock moving through his head with every heavy boom that makes him groan in a mix of fear and pain, as he starts to stagger under his own volition back towards what he thinks is bedrooms, almost stumbling and face planting into the coffee table in their way.*

*Byers collects Nancy forcibly around the waist, and Steve gets his feet under him and starts pushing them down the hall in a pile of sour-smell and gunpowder, and the two of them are fucking bleeding all over the place because their gauze is loose, because he gets it, he's with the program, let's go people, move, move, move-*

*Byers says, "Jump," and Steve does, because there's a fucking bear trap in the hallway what the fuck-*

*Soon they're in Byers's room, and Steve is near the window, about two seconds from going out of it and taking Wheeler with him, Byers can be fucking bait-*

*But the noise is getting quieter, and...*

*"What's it doing?" Nancy breathes, standing ready with the gun, while Byers holds a lighter ready, breath shaking and raspy in his throat. Suddenly the gasoline makes a lot more sense. Steve's shaking.*

*Because, here's the thing.*

*He's spent months being scared of this death thing that's been leading him all over Hawkins, giving him nightmares and making him dig a hole in his lawn with his pacing. It's as bad as the one time they had a tornado tear through the southern half of fifth street, and Steve had woken his parents up crashing around in his room like a little spastic. He doesn't like strange things, and strange things don't like him.*

*It's exactly what he's always been afraid of, and he's shaking. It's finally here, like a tornado touching down, and his lungs burn with the short shallow breaths he's sucking down, all gasoline and fear from Nancy and Jon. He feels like he's asleep, completely fucking sober and so hyper focused everything seems dream-like.*

*He moves to the phone, crashing, because he can't hear it outside in the hall, it's like it's Casper the fucking ghost, it dematerialized or some shit-*

*So he's out in the hall, and dialing on the phone and putting it to his ear and hearing not even a dial tone, and Nancy is grabbing it out of his hand and throwing it down.*

*Her nostrils are flared, and she's glaring, and the phone bounces on it's mute cord to hit him painfully in the knee as he flinches back. "Are you crazy?" He asks sincerely. Fuck he loves this girl, and he'd eat Byers for her, and he'd die for her, but she's so fucking insane.*

*"It's going to come back!" She snaps at him, thrusting forward, daring at him. He's dead still, heart hammering and he thinks he might puke. "So you need to leave."*

*He looks from her to Byers, lost. "Right. Now."*

*Steve leaves. Because that's the other thing about him; He's a coward.*

*He's out the door, and his heart is hammering.*

*In his head, he's already home, locking the door. Locking the sliding glass doors that look over his turquoise colored heated pool, that smells so bad he can't even open his bedroom window anymore; So much like death. He's already explaining to his mom why nice Nancy Wheeler doesn't come around anymore, yeah Mom, she was crazy, started hanging with Jonathan Byers-*

*He's already washing his sheets, that smell like Nancy.*

*He's already studying for his calculus test, with his notes, in Nancy's tilted palmer-style handwriting that looks like the fucking Gettysburg address.*

*He's hearing about how Nancy died. How her and Byers got attacked by a dog. Or caught up in a chemical spill. Or eaten by a monster, whatever the fucking radio decides to make of a monster falling out of the ceiling and eating the love of Steve's life.*

*Steve takes his hand off the handle of his car. His keys are still hanging in the door. There's no sounds in the trees, not a single lick of wind or chirp of insects.*

*The lights inside the Byers go off.*

*His teeth hurt. Like, a fucking lot. He's walking towards the house again, and he really thinks he might be sick, it hurts so bad.*

*He hasn't done this in so long, and he forgot how much it hurts, fuck. His head is like the worst sinus headache you can imagine times a hundred,*

his whole face lengthening, and he's sloping towards the door like something from a Hitchcock film as gunshots go off, and Nancy's screaming from inside. His clothes strain against him a moment before giving as he tears his way free, crashing against the porch, and up the steps all over again.

God he's scared. But Steve's always been scared.

Scared of being alone. Scared of his mom and dad leaving him, because they find out how different their perfect little boy is.

Scared of Byers, in that brief moment where he was caving Steve's fucking head in across from the movie theatre.

Scared of the monster he's felt coming for weeks, months, like a natural disaster. So strange it makes his eyes cross and his teeth hurt and his nose burn like a sneeze that won't come.

But mostly, he's scared of Nancy being dead.

So Steve Harrington drops to all fours, a snarl building in his gut as he crashes through the front door. It slams open, lock giving almost instantly like the cheap piece of shit it is and sending splinters flying.

He only takes a moment, inhaling the reek of death and sickness and sour fear, before throwing himself at the nightmare of oil-slick leather, and gnashing garbage disposal teeth that's pinning Byers to his shitty fucking living room floor.

He tears into it like confetti, and it feels fucking good.

#####

## 2. Chapter 2

#####

Byers is on the ground with the thing on top of him, and Steve hits it like a freight train.

He doesn't get too good a look at it- Clawed hands, a horrifyingly bipedal looking torso, and thick leathery hide that glistened with something like mucus. It's mouth is worst of all, flared open and full of rows of teeth strung together with glistening ropes of drool, fetid and damp enough where Steve can scent the rotten bone meal smell of it just coming through the door.

Up close it's not much better.

Him and the monster go tumbling in a pile of limbs, Steve snarling like a busted up car engine, and the monster screeching.

Nancy screams, and Steve would be worried, but he also has an armful of monster, so he's *kind of trying to focus*.

Byers is dead silent flat on his back, because he's a *serial killer* or something.

The coffee table splinters underneath the two of them, the monster screaming in pain, and Steve lunges down to bury his teeth in something, *anything* solid, his chest pounding and light flashing behind his eyes because this is *so fucking good*. Nancy's gun clicks on empty, and then he hears a metallic fumble as she tries to reload it, panting in fear and swearing impressively under her breath.

Steve ends up getting an arm, and his teeth clamp down, practically



touching through the bone as the thing shrieks. It's almost a mistake, because it starts thrashing, clawing across the furred bulk of Steve's shoulders and neck, barely making contact as Steve rolls with the hits, full body flinching like a dog that doesn't want to give up a toy. It throws the two of them across the living room in a tangle, knocking the arm chair on its side and sending Nancy scrambling out of the way, running to a now standing Jonathan, who moves in front of her, eyes hilariously huge. Jesus that's cute; they make him wanna *puke*.

It's dim in here, but Steve knows the thing has a huge mouth, a cross over its face full of teeth that rustles and flares like an inverted umbrella. Knows it has claws, as they latch onto his belly where he's soft, and throws him with a deadly shriek, Nancy screaming his name over the sound of the Byers family heirlooms smashing in their china cabinet, as Steve goes through the glass. His teeth are ripped free, and he feels skin caught in the spaces between, a taste like cancer on his tongue.

He's dazed, and lays there for a beat. He hasn't done this in a while, and his bones *hurt*, like fire, and the open wounds where the claws went into him hurt, and so does the glass inside of his right side where he landed.

The monster sounds like its hurting too, rattling like he wounded it, stalking forward. Glass and wood crunch under its feet, and over the sound of lights popping and Nancy and Byers scrambling around, Steve hears the floorboards creak under the massive weight. It's gotta be about seven fucking feet tall.

Steve gets up again. His legs shake a bit, and the flashing lights don't help to make the thing out against the backdrop of dark spotting in his vision. Jonathan yells again, and he sounds pissed, and Steve manages to focus in time to see the bat connect with the monster's face, sending a black splatter of ichor and gore across the carpet.

Gasoline is sharp in his nose, and combined with the blood, makes him gag, the taste left in his *mouth* making him gag-

The look on Byers face, as he stares at him across the living with those small eyes, making him gag, before the turns back to the thing.

The monster shrinks towards the floor as Jonathan takes another empty swing at it, whistling through the air, and it hisses like a rattlesnake, drawn back on a scaly neck, humanoid and naked and pulsating. It's an alien or something, but it moves like any predator, a spider or a deep sea fish. All short, jerky uncertain movements-

Until they're not.

Steve feels a primal disgust, down deep in his bones, and yeah. He's *scared*. He's been scared for a while, an anxiety he thought was so deep in his brain it was never going to leave.

But now that he has the thing he's scared of, in front of him? Rattling like a dry teakettle on the stove, tail lashing?

He's mainly pissed.

Steve's big.

When he was younger, he was small.

The first time this happened, he'd jammed himself under his own bed, and cried himself stupid in little puppy whimpers, scared and confused and worried about his mommy and daddy getting rid of him. (The memory had that foxed edge softness that most childhood memories had- But it wasn't really something you forgot.)

The second time it happened; Mostly the same.

His bed still had the hair under it, in chocolate brown clumps like he'd been keeping a secret dog. He'd jammed himself breathlessly in the corner of two walls, peering with huge lamp like eyes out at his

bedroom floor, where the light from his open window made pale shadows across his toys, and books, and playroom carpet.

He must've been six or so. Maybe seven. Still in therapy, and still convinced there was something wrong with him.

It had kept happening, until it hadn't. He knew it was still there, knew that it hadn't been a figment of his childhood imagination. But he'd been a *kid*, half convinced there was something irreparably wrong with him.

Now, he's about two hundred pounds of solid muscle; And his claws aren't clipped like a fucking dogs. They're *sharp*.

And he's not hiding under his bed any more.

Steve's across the room before the monster can move towards Byers, snarling and roaring, and he connects strong enough to rattle his own fucking brain. They sprawl sideways, and this time Steve doesn't go for the first thing he finds, he waits. He snarls, and lets the blows of the things claws bounce off of his head and the ruff of his fur as it screams, bulldogging up close like he's playing a home game on the court, waiting for the chance as blood spatters bright and hot across his muzzle-

And then he's lunging forward with his claws pinning the thing down by freaky, humanoid shoulders, getting its neck in his jaws and-

*Biting.*

It's tough to get through, and he almost pukes at the cut of gristle, the crunch of something chitinous and hard like the crust on an insect right under the stretch of leathery hide. It cuts the inside of his mouth, and he tastes copper underneath the disgusting burn of acid and gore that gushes between his teeth. It's like the smell of death that scared him, the putrid smell that was on Nancy and on Byers

hands, only it's in *his mouth* and he's *heaving*, struggling with the monster as it thrashes and screams.

Nancy's screaming too, mostly angry, and it's super cute and all but the thing gets a claw under his chin and *rips* up, and Steve howls in pain and rage and goes backwards, blinded by the burn of it and trying to manage, but it doesn't do him much good as liquid splashes warm down his front, too quick and too soon to feel the pain he knows he *should* be feeling.

It's on it's on its feet before Steve is, because he's gushing blood and dizzy as shit- And maybe puking a little bit. Geez he's a vision.

The good news, is it forgets all about Jonathan and Nancy and the bat.

The bad news, is a little self evident as the eyeless face turns towards him. Like one of those meat eating plants he saw in a video in biology class; Cold, and completely blank.

The monster stalks forward again, mouth rustling like a jellyfish, and dripping across the floor as it circles slowly around the splintered remains of the table. Black stains the Byers carpet, and Steve blearily thinks as he staggers to all four paws that if the gasoline hadn't ruined the shag, this certainly would. Never mind the blood Steve has coming from his fucking face.

"Steve!" Hollers Byers, and there's the small *snick* of a lighter going. "*Get it in the trap!*"

Steve turns towards him, flicking an ear and rumbling, and the monster takes the opportunity to strike.

It moves fast- Almost faster than he can follow. But Steve's ready.

He's been leaning on his front right paw, faking like it hurt and lowering his dripping head. But as soon as the fucker comes close enough, one clawed hand getting in his shoulder (about a foot fucking deep it feels like), he's moving his jaws to the right and up, twisting like a snake. His teeth sink deep and the putrid blood congeals in his mouth like rotten milk, but he doesn't let go. He pushes back, the two of them snarling and legs tangling together, sounding like two lawn mowers going at it.

One foot.

Another.

He keeps pushing, and it's tearing him up, but then there's a whistling *thock*, and gore splatters up across his muzzle, solid bits amidst the black like little chips of bone. Byers yanks the bat back out of the thing with a disgusting sucking noise, staggering back, and it goes limp. Still alive, it's pulse thudding slow and reptilian and stupid under his tongue, but limp for a moment, twitching.

Steve fights his revulsion long enough to throw it back, roaring, and there's a solid metal sound as the trap snaps shut on the thing in the hallway, almost catching Steve's front paw. (That would've been just fucking perfect.)

The monster shrieks, thrashing, and catches him one last time across the muzzle as he yelps and scrambles backwards, falling back and dragging his face across the carpet in pain because he doesn't have any fucking *hands* at the moment.

Byers drops the lighter, and there's a *foom* of ignition.

Warmth washes over Steve's face, light flaring up brighter than the Byers living room probably has ever been, flickering wildly as the creature shrieks higher and sharper than a train whistle, than a car horn. Louder than any siren or school bell. He feels sick from the blood, and he's probably swallowed a gallon of the shit, retching and

blinded, and staggering back now that he's done, he's *finished*. Steve Harrington finished the fucking fight.

"Steve!" Nancy screams, and throws herself at him, her small hands going deep into his fur while she half drags, half guides him back towards the living room. The monster burning smells like a trash fire, thick and oily and smoke pluming up in thick coils to heave against the ceiling, splashing like something liquid. Nancy puts her weight on him, holding him still- And he honestly hadn't realized he'd been scrabbling backward, whining deep in his chest in pain. "Steve, oh my god, what the fuck, *what the fuck*-"

She pins him down, and he stops struggling, panting with his tongue all swollen and lolling out of his mouth, and yeah, he threw up about two feet off to his left, all black and bile, but it's okay, because the *thing* is screaming, and burning.

Steve can hear the crackling of skin, like chicken frying. He probably loses time, as Nancy strokes the fur on his head, in the divot between his eyes, as he shuts them and tries to concentrate on not bleeding out.

He doesn't hear it die. That's the fucking worst part. Just the crumbling sound of it leaving through the floor.

Byers sprays the blaze in the hallway with a fire extinguisher, probably to keep his piece of shit house from going up in flames, hissing and sizzling. Steve doesn't particularly care, because Nancy's putting her hands on his muzzle, barely able to cover the width of it with her fingers he's so fucking big, whining like a puppy and trying to get his tongue to stay in his mouth.

She whispers some nonsense at him, and heaves his head up into her lap with a grunt of effort. Steve lets her, and finally gets his tongue in his mouth so it's not unrolled onto Nancy Wheeler's fucking lap like a

goddamn cartoon character.

It still tastes like death in his mouth, but he's too tired to throw up anymore. He lets Nancy stroke the fur on his head, and rumbles as smoke and the chemical fog from the extinguisher fills his nose. He can't smell Nancy under it, even with his nose jammed up into her soft belly, but he can feel her fingertips stroking the curve of his ear and under his jaw, jerking tentatively when she finds blood and open cuts.

It was worth it, just to get the motherfucker. Something primal in Steve's gut purrs, because the monster's gone and Steve made it go. Away from *his* fucking town.

Jonathan falls to his knees next to them, and Steve's feeling charitable, as well as very, *very* tired and maybe a little shock-y, because he doesn't bite his balls off.

"We've got to get him to, to, a hospital or something-" His hands hover over Steve, and now he's *not* feeling so charitable, because he lifts a lip up and snarls, daring him to. He's bleeding like a stuck pig, but so help him *god* he'll take Byers' hand off.

"*Steve*, you asshole!" Nancy snaps, and to his indignation she grabs his muzzle and pins it shut. He wiggles a bit, whining, but she's not having any of it, grunting in effort, and wrestling him back into her lap. He's not *complaining*, but the positive of being this close to Nancy Wheelers crotch is slightly dampened by the fact that Jonathan Byers is putting his hands on his neck, and trying to keep his blood inside of him.

Steve has had worse days. Maybe.

He shuts his eyes, skin running hot and itching, as he concentrates. The change back is always weird, especially since he doesn't really gain or lose much mass. Just shape.

It hurts, and he can hear Nancy freaking out over him, distant and muffled while his ears rearrange themselves as if she's underwater, keeping up a moaning litany of "*oh god, oh god, oh god-*"

Jonathan is simply breathing hard, holding Steve down, and he guess that might be okay, because he has about a liter of blood coming out of him right now, and he never really was good at holding still.

Jonathan's big hands press down from his neck to his ribcage, and Nancy keeps his muzzle pinned- And soon he's laying with his back to the carpet, dust and fibers sticking to his back tacky with sweat, and chest heaving in pain. He's naked, because he always is. Ever since he was little. The same fucking thing.

The smoldering fire in the hallway snaps and pops as it cools, and Steve's bones click and grind into place like legos. It makes him groan in pain, putting himself onto one shoulder, elbow pressing painfully into splintered wood scattered into the carpet.

"Shit." He manages, gasping air, and turning on his side as he feels something roil in his stomach. Out comes a spew of black bile and blood, choking him as he leans away from Nancy, even though she's trying to keep him in her lap like the sweetheart she is, Jesus H Christ. It splatters down his chin and onto the floor, even as he tries to wipe it away with his free hand. It feel like he poisoned himself, sick to his stomach. "*Fuck.*"

"It's okay, it's gone now." Nancy says soothingly, and she's putting fingers through his hair, making hushing noises. But Steve shakes his head, and pushes her off, panting, making himself stand. "We have to- We have to get out of here. Hospital, or- Or the school we *have to go get Mike.*" Nancy grows slightly more hysterical, and Steve idly thinks where the gun went.

"No." He says, panting, and threatens Byers with a snarl when he makes to grab Steve, and make him *calm down* or some shit. "We're not going *anywhere*, until you tell me what the fuck that was." He stands a moment, a little dizzy, probably more from the shock than the blood dripping warm down his front.

Nancy is very pointedly looking at his face with eyes still big as



saucers; But there’s also a small blush to her cheeks, and a relieved, almost hysterical twitch of a smile on her mouth.

Jonathan is staring and very firmly red.

“And maybe get me some pants.” He adds.

#####

**Notes for the Chapter:**

Hey guys sorry if this is short. And also, fight scenes are very hard to do. All the comments everyone left were SO NICE, geez.

I've never written consistently in present tense before, so this is a new one for me. Again, any discrepancies are due to very little editing, and no beta. :) It's clocked out pretty much at 17k and I'm picking at it as I post. But this work is basically a prequel to what I WANT to write, which is SEASON 2.

### 3. Chapter 3

#### Summary for the Chapter:

Whelp guys I need to stop poking at this before it gets worse than it is already. So here! I've been pretty down in the dumps lately, and I really appreciate all the comments and kudos. I write things out of a desperate need for stories I want to see, but it's always really nice to know people enjoy something that you put out there into the world.

#####

Byers heaves him into the backseat of his old shitty car, and Steve's momentarily impressed with how strong he is. Wouldn't know it looking at him, but he feels some bulk under the sleeves of Jonathan's denim jacket.

Unfortunately, Steve isn't quite firing on all cylinders yet, and doesn't manage to unhook his arm from around Jonathan's neck long enough for him to free himself. They both go in together with a grunt, and Steve yelps when an elbow makes contact with his bandaged side.

"Ow."

Nancy had been a girl scout, he remembers vaguely, when the makeshift bandages barely budge. They're tight around his collarbone and shoulder, covering the worst of the gouges on his neck and chest with a sweater pulled over to cut out the autumn chill. His face is a mess of butterfly bandages and antiseptic ointment. Even with the washing he'd gotten in the kitchen sink, they feel hot, but he'd been too distracted to take a look at them in a mirror. Reluctant, if he's being honest. Although, Nancy's face when she'd cleaned them with careful fingers had been a study.

He should really go to the hospital, he thinks, smelling the faint french fry smell of the Byers family Pinto where his face is squished

into the seat. Jonathan's apologizing profusely above him, and Steve makes the mature decision not to kick him, or bite or something.

He's not sure why, but all of a sudden he really wants to bite Byers.

They work to untangle in the backseat, and Nancy crunches through gravel to the drivers side, landing in the seat and slamming the keys into the ignition while the two of them in the back try to struggle into sitting. Byers car- and Steve recognizes it from the school parking lot, rusty spots and grumbling engine and all- starts with noisy reluctance.

It takes the length of the driveway for Steve to get his head above seat level, uncharitably digging a knee into Jonathan's gut to get himself upright. The trees are still as creepy as when he pulled up; Doubly so, since now he almost got killed by a monster that could be lurking anywhere underneath the impenetrable canopy of leaves. He remembers the good ole days, when he only worried about coyotes, or mountain lions.

Nancy ignores them while she maneuvers onto the road, headlights bouncing wildly, and making the two of them crash together in the back. Steve winces when his wounds throb, but Byers does a pretty good job of cushioning them both after the initial collision, acting all mother hen and managing not to jam an elbow into his gaping side. *Again.*

The sound of gravel turns into dirt, and then turns into asphalt. A grind of rubber, and then they're coasting towards town.

"How the fuck did you turn into a giant dog." Byers asks once they're on the state road towards town, even though *no one asked him*, and Steve is too busy trying to quell his turning stomach to hit him or something. Feels like he ate something rotten. (*Don't think about it don't think about it don't-*)

"Because I'm fucking awesome." Steve grits out, as Nancy takes a

turn, and he's rammed into the door. She makes a noise like she doesn't believe him, snorting heavy in the back of her throat. "*Fuck*. Okay, fine you wanna do question time?" He shoves irritably at Byers, even though they're still in the turn, so the big idiot doesn't even *move*. "What the fuck was that thing I just ate."

"*Eugh*, you ate it?! Jesus, *Steve*-" Nancy scunches her nose, in a *very* not cute way.

"*It was kind of hard not to.*" Steve half screams. He starts thinking about it, and starts to feel pretty sick all over again remembering, stomach turning even more. Luckily, *this* shove with the energy of sheer nausea behinds it gets Byers to fucking *move* this time, half under Steve as he makes for the window.

"Augh, god-"

Byers goes to stop him with a crazy look; Like Steve is going to throw himself out the moving car or something. But Steve shoves his dumb concerned face into the back of the seat, and scrambles over him to reach the outside air, thanking god the window was already open as he gets his head out of it in time to hurl.

Not much comes up, and none of it gets on the car, as much as he's sure it'd improve the upholstery. Some black bile dribbles onto his chin through his teeth and paints the side of his face, and he moans, catching it with the fabric he still had fisted in his hand from mopping the blood off his face. Steve rests his neck against the sharp edge of the door, sweaty and miserable. It still tastes like that thing is in his mouth, and as much as it was *worth it*, he can practically still feel it between his teeth. "*Fuck.*"

The wind rushes in his ears loud enough that he can't hear Byers being hysterical, although the guy's got one hand hooked on Steve's arm to steady him, and the other uncertainly pressed against his sweaty spine. It sticks the soft lining of the menthol scented sweater he's wearing to his skin, in the shape of a handprint.

Steve feels kind of nice about that, while he watches the asphalt go disappearing under the tire wheels, cold sweat beading on his temples. Byer's is a real sweetheart for someone who caved his face

in not too long ago.

He must have his head hanging out the window for five miles, just feeling it rush in his ears and through his hair, carrying the smell of Hawkins to him and trying not to puke down the side of the car. He spits a few more times, hot air and liquid coming up his throat and painting the road on their way into town, until he's just limp and miserable and empty, with Byers holding him in the car.

Finally, there's pressure as Jonathan draws him back in, and Steve slumps against the door, feeling a bit revived thanks to the night air and spitting up the rest of that black shit; His stomach has stopped turning so much, at least. "Thanks." He offers grudgingly, shrugging Byers hand off, not unkindly. "Alright. Dog thing. Right. I've, uh. Always been able to do that."

He feels detached. Actually telling someone about it.

He'd thought about it before, telling someone. But he always felt like saying it out loud would make it real. Make it something more besides just strange quirks of personality, bottles of pills in his medicine cabinet, waking at night blinking dazed and watching his nails retract.

Plus the only person he would have considered telling would have been Tommy, and he wasn't the most... Understanding, open minded guy.

He'd almost said it once, when they'd both been high and Steve had been so strung out by wandering the cold September woods, that he'd been desperate to tell someone. *Anyone*. Right there by the quarry, the two of them pressing shoulder together on the engine warm hood of the Beemer. He'd needed someone to understand this restless fear roiling under his skin, like a hurricane was going to touch down. Like a fire was burning the town down around them, and no one could see but him.

He'd needed *Tommy* to understand.

At the last minute he chickened out, dug the three quarter bottle of his dad's bourbon out of the trunk, and they'd stayed out till the stars crept over the ink black tangle of the tree-line. Talking the usual trash. Listening to the latest bullshit Carol had done, that made Tommy all soft and maudlin about how much he loved her, the crazy bitch. About how shitty Steve's dad had been, about the latest line up for the basketball team.

But now, Nancy is looking at him with big eyes in the rear view, and Byers is staring at him like he's a freak, and Steve puts his shoulders up defensively. "Fuck off."

"No, no. I'm not-" Byers holds his hands up, flustered, and Nancy turns to glare at Steve. The car veers dangerously, and both Byers and him go white knuckled on the opposite doors.

"Steve."

"Alright! Yes, fuck, eyes on the road!" He yelps, and Nancy turns in a huff to glare out the front window. "I've been able to do it since I was like, six or whatever, it's not a big thing." He says, completely stupidly, because *it's obviously a really big thing*. Jonathan doesn't look like he buys it, staring at him with round surprised eyes. "I mean, I haven't in a while, because it's... You know. Not normal."

Jonathans nodding slowly, and Nancy's busy trying to drive like a lunatic, and Steve is starting to want to punch him again. "Yeah, uh. Makes sense it- Does it hurt?"

"No, it's like a warm tickle- *Yes it fucking hurts.*"

"Steve I swear to *god* if you can't be nice-"

"I think regarding the circumstances, *I'm being very nice.*"

Nancy takes a turn, and she must be in a *mood* because Steve hits his head on the window again with a yelp. The tires squeal, and for a minute he thinks they might blow- But the car straightens out, and Steve pushes Jonathan off of him where he'd slid over and almost into his lap.

“Can your parents do that?” Jonathan asks, and Steve barks out a laugh at the idea of his dad, globe-hopping stock broker with his mega neat haircut and failing eyesight, turning into a wolf and tearing up the Hawkins woods.

His mom; Not so much. She’d be believable. Simone Harrington née *di Siena* could be a crazy bitch when her mood swung right.

“Not as far as I know.” Steve says instead, wiping restlessly at his mouth and not looking at Byers.

“Can *anyone* else you know do that? Like, an uncle or something?”

“Nope.” Steve figures he’d be able to smell them. Maybe.

“You don’t seem to know a lot.” Byers mouth tilts in an unhappy, vaguely judgemental looking line, and Steve bristles.

“Well gee fucking whizz Byers, I’m sorry my life isn’t goddamn *American werewolf in London-*”

“Hey, I’m just saying, seems like something you may have wanted to like, *experiment*, with or something? Ask your parents about?” Byers is looking snobby in that irritated prissy way he’s got, and Steve snorts all indignant, all fired up just looking at his pretentious face.

“Sorry, it never came up over *meatloaf*.”

Jonathan looks like he wants to say more, but shuts his mouth, looking out his window, frustration stinking off of him. Steve glares at him a bit. Jesus. He bet he told his mom *everything*. What a mama’s boy.

But the car is quiet, and he’s trying to explain, so Steve rolls his eyes heavily and crosses his arms, glaring between the seats.

“Can hear real good too. Smell, you know.” He taps his nose and mentions as a peace offering, and geez, Byers is back to looking at him.

“How good?”

“Uh like, I don’t know.” Nancy looks over her shoulder with that furrow in her brow, like she’s listening, and curious, and Steve looks away from her and towards Byers. It’s too much like that look she gives him when they’re studying, and it makes him a little hot under the collar. Geez. No wonder he’s failing chemistry. “Heartbeats.”

Jonathan looks a little creeped out, and Steve decides sharing time is over. Well, not *over*. But definitely switching gears.

Steve stick his head in between the seats, getting where he can see Nancy better. And *not* see Byers. “Alright, I showed you mine. We can finish show and tell later. Now, your turn.” He lets out a long breath, still feeling the pull from wounds the thing gave him, the tense silence from the trees pressing on the sides of the roads all dark and looming. “*What the fuck was that thing?*”

He has a horrifying thought. “Was it *an alien?*” He wouldn’t be surprised, and starts to get a little hysterical, claws digging into the seats under his grip. “Oh god, did I just swallow alien goo?”

“Not exactly.” Nancy says, grip tight on the wheel. They’re speeding, and judging from the direction, Steve thinks they’re heading towards the back road that leads towards the middle school. The ones you go through when you don’t want cops to see you speeding.

He’d let Nancy drive the Beemer once; And while it had been some kind of a *look*, her behind the wheel of his car, she’d driven like a grandma. Slow, and careful, and bitching at him when he teased her all playful and put wet lips to the downy hair behind her ear.

Now, she hasn’t touched the brakes in about 3 miles. She’s all tight control, and wind screaming off the nose of the Pinto, tapping perfectly clipped nails against the faux leather of the steering wheel. “So. You know the lab just outside of town? The energy one?” She starts, hesitantly, throat clicking.

“Yeah, the one no one can get a job at because they’re all hush hush?” Steve settles in to listen, putting his weight on his elbows that rest on the center console. Nancy takes a deep breath.

And then another. Byers makes a disgruntled noise as Steve takes up



the whole back seat, but he ignores it, because now he can watch the road out the front window, and hear Nancy over the rush of wind through the open windows and the hiss of tires on the road. It only takes a moment for Jonathan to roll his side up, shivering, even though Steve is still feeling fever hot and excited.

And she tells him everything.

#####

The school is crawling with people when they pull up.

There's not many streetlights on the school, and the lawns that stretch around it are large enough where it looks sinister and dark where it squats on top of the hill. Buses sit quiet in the yard, and behind them Steve can make out vans parked haphazardly, people in uniforms milling around and setting up equipment. Flood lights, crates. A generator, guttering quietly to itself like the boat motors on Lovers Lake.

"Are those cops?" Steve asks, frowning. But even as he says it, he knows that's not right.

Their vehicles are unmarked, electrical vans that he thinks he's seen around town before, with a blue logo he doesn't remember anyone ever buying from. They're not wearing utility jumpsuits, but army uniforms and unmarked body armor. It looks bulky, professional, and Steve feels the first cold sliver of fear as Nancy slows, the three of them peering out the right side windows like jackasses, Jonathan practically steaming up the glass until Steve elbows him.

"The army works at that lab right? Where that little girl is from?" He asks quietly, like the men with guns would hear them all the way outside the fence and through the car. It is quiet, now that the car's

slowed and Steve's heart isn't pounding like crazy.

( *He can hear them of course. Distant and muffled on the wind, the crackle of radios and somber conversation that he can't quite make the words out of. Something about sectors, like they're in a goddamn movie.*)

"Yes." Nancy says shortly, clipped, turning back to the road and continuing. She's white knuckled on the wheel, breath coming short and sharp through her nose. Less nervous, more pissed. To Steve's horror she doesn't go far, pulling off to the side of the road and unbuckling. The engine clicks off, ticking from heat, and she takes a moment to shake, to let the energy jitter out of her.

"Whoah, whoah, whoah. What're we doing?" He asks as Nancy finishes, and reaches into the passenger side of the car, and retrieves her gun, checking the ammo and cylinder before snapping it shut. It looks large in her hands, ugly and snub nosed and cold.

Steve's never much cared for guns.

"Where are you going?" He asks, as she gets out of the car, slamming it shut behind her. He kind of thinks he knows, but also wants to ask just in case she wants to prove him wrong.

Jonathan is getting out too, and Steve follows with a groan, already imagining a future in some military prison getting his feet beat with hoses, or water boarded, or whatever they did with three teenagers breaking through a military perimeter.

"My brother's in there." She says fiercely, sticking the gun in her coat pocket, and reaching up to fix her hair. "I'm going to go get him."

Jonathan shrugs at Steve when he turns his aghast look over to him, retrieving the bat from the floor of the back seat.

"My little brother's still missing." Jonathan says simply, giving the bat a few practice swings. He doesn't say that these are the people who tried to hide him from his family, who faked a little boys death, but Steve can hear it in his voice. They told him about Hopper and Joyce, and where they'd gone, what they were doing right this

moment; and the thought gives him the creeps.

He's sore, his face fucking hurts worse on top of Jonathan pulverising it, and his teeth ache in that weird way that pisses him off. These people are giving him the same prickly, rumbling feeling that he got when someone touched him unexpectedly, or put their hands on his stuff. Same feeling that had his mom putting him on three different goddam prescriptions and mood stabilizers, that he mostly flushed down the toilet.

(Let *her* fucking load up on the prescriptions. He was good on pot and dad's liquor cabinet, *thanks*.)

He doesn't like them in his town, and it makes him waver between the knee-watering urge to run away, and fight back. A little push is all it takes for him to go after Nancy and Byers as they hike up the back slope to the schoolyard, quiet in the wet leaves and breath puffing in faint clouds.

There isn't a single kid in Hawkins who hasn't skipped in eighth grade, and taken the back fence towards the arcade.

The cold air feels good on his face, and Steve inhales the leaf litter and ozone smell of winter as they hike, wet and crisp. The picnic tables and squeaking swings behind the school look ominous at night, like most do when there's no kids around. Him and Tommy had snuck into the highschool once at night and fucked around, drinking beer and opening up lockers with a stolen key from the janitor. They hadn't found much but some pot, taped up pictures, and to their delight some porn mags. They'd scared the shit out of themselves telling ghost stories, and daring each other to go down into the boiler room with the lights off.

The feeling now is the same, but worse. Like they aren't supposed to be here, and Steve can feel the hair on the back of his neck prickling as they jump the fence. For a moment him and Byers move to help Nancy at the same time, before dropping their hands like idiots when they realize they're doing it. She gives them a dirty look and climbs it easy, the revolver in her pocket pulling her coat down into a straight line where it hangs open.

Jonathan looks sheepish and follows, and after a moment of moaning and groaning about it, Steve does too. The sweatpants Jonathan lent him catch at the top, and he has to spend a moment freeing himself without tearing it, swearing quietly, because this is probably a goddamn Byers family heirloom. Not that they're not already ruined with blood and whatever that black shit was, but he'd feel bad tearing them as well.

By the time he catches up to the other two, they're furtively trying the door to the school- Byers trying to jimmy it, and Nancy keeping watch. It doesn't look like he's having much luck, using a screwdriver he procured from god knows where, and Steve manages not to roll his eyes with a huge amount of effort. Jonathan's the least criminal type he knew, barring his brief attempt at murder involving Steve's face. This was probably going to take awhile.

"The kids were in the gym, but they must've moved. It's crawling with soldiers." Nancy whispers at him, coming close enough for a moment for Steve to smell her, effort and the walk warming her skin. He tries not to be a huge fucking creep and nods back, shoving his hands in his armpits and shivering. He doesn't have a coat because the Byers were too poor or something, so he's just wearing the sweater and sweatpants, and freezing his nuts off. Luckily, Steve's shoes were still intact out on the front lawn, although he'd shredded through his favorite jacket.

(Nancy had looked a little ill as he'd sorted through the shredded remains of his clothes, holding his newly bandaged side, and groaning when he found his jeans torn and the shirt stretched to hell. His jacket had a rip up the back that probably wasn't fixable. Byers had found him something to wear while Nancy had made some frantic phone calls in the living room, both of them prickly and wary while they navigated around each other.)

Someone crunches through gravel around the east side of the building, and Steve's heart jumps into his throat.

Nancy and Jonathan don't notice, obviously, because Steve is a freak and can hear stupidly well. It was something he'd rather not be able to do, because it mostly just let him hear everything his parents said in the house the few times they were home- not a lot of which was what he wanted to be over hearing.

Now however, it lets him know they're taking too fucking long.

"Move, move, *move*-" He hisses, shoving Byers aside and almost knocking him down. He tries the handle, jiggling it and swearing while Nancy and Jonathan press anxiously against his back, breathing all over him when the footsteps come into their own hearing range. The adrenaline makes him give it a little more force than he intended, and the whole handle twists in his hand, gives with a shriek and a pop-

And they all scramble inside before the flashlight lights the doorway they're piled into.

Steve gently shuts the door, and the three of them wait breathlessly as the footsteps outside get closer, crunching across gravel. For a moment Steve sees light wash under the door, across his sneaker where he's pressed against it under the window, all three of them crouched, his teeth aching as the footsteps get closer.

Nancy lets out a smooth, slow breath, and clicks the safety of her gun off.

Just as Steve's ready to take off down the hall, the radio on the guys belt goes off.

*"Four in the south hall, all EC's move to position. We have contact-"*

The crackle goes funny, the last half of the transmission lost, and

Steve feels limp with relief when the guy on the other side gives a heavy sigh, replying with a “*Wilco.*” He moves off back where he came.

“Must not have noticed the busted lock.” Jonathan breathes, and Nancy nods in agreement, while Steve just lets his sweaty forehead rest against the cool cinder block wall. Nancy touches Steve’s arm briefly in thanks, before moving down the hall, gun held pointed down at her side.

They follow her, Steve hysterically running a loop in his mind of just what they’re going to do if they run into somebody. He could hear the footsteps echoing wildly throughout the school, the crackle of radios and jingle of carabiners hanging off of belts and straps. They smelled strongly of sterile burlap and plastic, an oily smell that Steve never likes when he smelled it on new clothes, that cut over the fresh school smell of floor wax and paper. He normally ran clothes through the wash three or four times without soap before he wore them.

They could only sneak so far before the three of them were forced to—What? Shoot them? They were *military*. This wasn’t a movie or something. They were going to get arrested, if not *shot*. They were going to get filled with so many bullets, that when they dump their bodies in the quarry they’ll sink straight to the bottom, and no one would ever find know any better. His mom and dad would probably assume he ran away to Indianapolis, or hopped a train or something. Or offed himself, like his mom’s half brother. Jesus.

Maybe they’d think that Byers killed him, and ran off with Nancy, he thinks idly, as they press along the lockers and reach an intersection lit by a wildly flickering fluorescent light. Way more likely than Steve skipping town, or offing himself. If they thought he got all upset and moony enough over a girl to kill himself, he’d probably kill himself for *real*.

They’re in a cute little line all half crouched and nervously sweating, when Steve gets a whiff of something that makes him start to shiver.

He reaches out and grabs onto Jonathan's arm a little too hard, suddenly stiff and quivering and Byers throws him a bewildered look, nudging Nancy to get her attention.

For a minute he thinks he's smelling himself. Nancy and Jonathan smell like blood themselves, and all three of them reek of sweat and fear. Not to mention Steve has been leaking like a sieve for a while, sweating and a little dizzy and probably too hot for how cold it is.

But the hint of blood he gets now isn't the bright, sharp smell of a cut. This is a dark, fluid smell. Like... It smelled like the inside of a body you weren't meant to see. And as the scent builds they hear voices raising, the kids.

"Mike!" Nancy gasps, and she's off, running towards where they hear the voices. Byers grabs Steve and helps him along, because under the voices there's another sound that's high and sharp like a dog whistle, getting higher and higher until it's *hurting*, and Byers is more carrying Steve than anything, trying to keep up with Nancy while Steve holds both hands to his ears and groans.

They round the corner.

The boys are almost hidden behind the bulk of soldiers, four of them Steve vaguely recognizes from hanging at Nancy's house. (Rolling his eyes at the excited screaming voices downstairs, and the smell of chips and soda pop. Why kids always sound so sticky, he has no goddamn idea.) The hallway's dark where the lights have burnt and burst with hissing *pops*. It smells like burnt wiring and fear, the lights on the soldier's rifles illuminating the five kids in lurid streaks, all big scared eyes and prickly bristling as they shout at the soldiers in an overlapping angry swearing that completely drowns out the orders to *'step back, away from the girl-'*

In front of them is a little girl, fists clenched and standing in front of the boys almost defensively, glaring; And when Steve catches her eyes between the black bulky arms of the soldiers, and the woman in

a tan coat, the sound he'd been hearing rises to such a high pitch that he goes onto one knee with a shout, Byers making baffled noises above him and trying to keep him up by one arm.

It rises to a fever pitch, and Steve throws Jonathan off of him, reeling back to put a back to the wall, and at the same time there's a myriad of *snaps*. Like tree branches bursting under a cold snap.

It's a meaty sound, immediately followed by the sound of people collapsing that Steve almost doesn't hear through the relief of silence.

*"What the fuck."* He gasps fervently, shaking his head and feeling his ears gingerly. It feels like there should be blood coming out of them, but when he brings his fingers back there's only the dried flakes of what had been there already.

"Mike? *Mike?*" Nancy's picking her way around the fallen men, and Steve's relieved to hear the click of a safety going on. He's concerned at how attuned he is to that sound now. There's a rustle of clothing and Steve looks up in time to see the little girl slump down, slowly, eyes fluttering. "Oh my god. Is she okay?" Nancy rushes forward as the boys crowd around Eleven, going to her knees and pushing them gently aside to turn her onto her back. *"Move, give me some space. Shit, shit."*

The sight of so many dead bodies in Steve's old middle school, surrounded by black looming lockers and pastel flyers advertising school functions makes him nauseous. It's brighter at least with the flashlights that fell to the ground where the rifles had dropped, and Steve thinks maybe they should check and make sure they're not going to go off by an errant kick.

"You okay?" Byers asks him with wide eyes, helping Steve back to his feet. He accepts the help, dizzy and still with an ache in his head.

"Yeah." He looks down at the little girl, where Nancy's checking her breathing, her hair falling over her shoulder when she bends to put her cheek to the girl's- *Eleven's*, that must be Eleven- mouth. "Must've been her weird psychic shit." He runs a hand through his hair, scrubbing, and Jonathan gives him a dubious look.



Nancy waves the boys off, “Move back you little mouth breathers, *god-*” And takes her coat off, tucking it under Eleven’s head and tilting her head back like a good little girl scout. God she was cute sometimes. The trio hover like little boyfriends, all anxious concern, before the one with the stupid fucking hat looks up and sees Steve and gives him a face that almost makes him die. Jesus he was goofy looking, didn't anyone tell this kid not to make faces like that if you were so fucking goofy looking?

“Is that *Steve Harrington?*”

It sets the whole idiot brigade off.

“What’s *he* doing here, *Nancy-*”

“He’s going to blow the whole thing! He’s gotta get out of here-”

“*Nancy*, you promised not to tell anyone!”

“What’s wrong with his face, *did you beat him up Jonathan?! Oh my god that’s so cool-*”

Steve reels, blinking, and turning to Jonathan to give him an incredulous look. He looks sheepish and shrugs back. “Yeah, I don’t know, they’re kinda funny.”

“Yeah, real cute. Alright, shut it you little brats, I’m here to help, so fu- freaking deal with it.” He sighs, bending down to check the rifle at his feet, grimacing at the feel. He finds a safety, and to his relief it’s on. The kids keep yammering suspiciously while Byers follows his lead, bat scraping on the ground when he bends down, and they give each other pained looks through the dim light as they start working

on the guns.

He tries not to focus on the bodies, shuddering when he meets one of their eyes, all bloody in the whites and dripping with gore. It's not all blood, half clear liquid like mucus or brain matter, black as ink in the dark. The smell makes him want to gag, and he does a little bit, when his sneaker goes through a thick puddle of the shit.

It's the heavy smell and the kids all piling around Eleven at a safe distance, chattering over each other-

*("She's still breathing-" "Yeah, but she's not waking up-" "Yeah, I can see that Mike you little idiot-" "Don't call me an idiot!" "You are kind of stating the obvious-")*

Which is why Steve doesn't hear the rest of the soldiers coming. Not until they're almost around the corner, and he stiffens.

"Leave her."

Steve and Jonathan whirl around, Byers lifting his bat threateningly, and Steve twitches in badly hidden surprise, edging back. A man in a suit, white hair and an almost handsome face, rounds the corner trailed by another guy in a suit and two soldiers. Both with guns drawn. His hands are tucked in his pockets, a pleasant smile on his face, almost lineless except for kind looking wrinkles around his eyes and mouth.

"Step back." Jonathan threatens. "We're not fucking around." Steve's surprised at how convincing it is; Johnny's growing a pair apparently. Beating up youths in the streets, threatening government officials. Regular bad boy.

"We're taking the kids and leaving. And you're *not* taking this little girl." Steve's got his eyes on the guy in charge, bristling and nervous, but he hears Nancy stand up behind him, and judging from the cold tone of her voice she's probably pointing a gun. There's a quiver to it, a faint watery quality, but Nancy's always been one of those people

who sound tearful when she's super fucking pissed. From what he'd seen in the Byers house though, she's a pretty good fucking shot, scared or not.

*("Holy shit man, your sister has a fucking gun-" "Yeah, thanks Dustin, I HAVE EYES-")*

"That *little girl* is my daughter, and property of the United States government." The man's tone is even, calm, and he holds hands out to either side of himself in a disarming gesture, reasonable. As if they're being *hysterical* or something, when his men are moving carefully around him, with rifles pointed half between the ground and a *bunch of children*. "You don't know the full extent of circumstances in place, the gears in motion. I understand how it looks, and your efforts are admirable. But this is all for the best, for *your own good*. Put your weapons down, and step aside."

The offer's almost soothing. If he didn't know any better, if the kid behind him wasn't waking up and making scared, hurt whimpers while that little shit Wheeler made soothing noises at her, Steve might have relaxed. Might have let his claws come out of where they were embedded in his palm. Steve's therapist had the same voice when he was a kid. Clipped and smooth, with a way of breathing real quiet between words that made Steve relax.

But in the circumstances? Where they were *at*? Nobody should be able to talk that way when surrounded by dead bodies.

"I realize you think you know what's happening, but I assure you, she is highly dangerous and requires facilities to keep her, *and* others, safe." The man tries again, when no one makes a move to throw their weapons down. Steve vaguely wishes he had something to brandish. A crowbar or something.

He inhales deep, nervous and scared shitless that they were going to get shot, or arrested. The guy is trim, put together, only a few faint scuffs of Hawkins dust on his polished oxfords and the clean smell of dry cleaning and chemicals Steve can't place on his coat. The man next to him smells much the same, linen-like, and the soldiers smell like the rest. Plastic, and sweat, and metal.

He smells something else, and at the same time his head whips around, Eleven gives a gasp.

He smells the demigorgon.

“We got a problem.” Steve steps back away from the man and his goons, peering around restlessly. Nancy doesn’t move, gun pointed, but her mouth tightens and she goes pale. “That thing-”

Jonathan doesn’t even hesitate, shoving his bat at Steve who takes it with a bewildered grunt. “Cover me.” He says simply, going over to the kids. The soldiers start moving forward, and suddenly there’s a *bang*, so loud and so close to Steve’s ears that he almost goes down again with a yelp.

“I said *we’re leaving*.” Nancy says shortly, and Steve can hear her pulse hammering; Can see it in the hollow of her throat where her hair is stuck with sweat, moving over the collar of her shirt. It smells like gunsmoke, a splintered hole in the wall behind the soldiers, just over their heads.

For a moment Steve’s dizzy, spots appearing in his vision and chest tight because he’s *panicking*, because he thinks they’re going to open fire. No fucking way they wouldn’t.

But just as he’s gearing up to throw himself over Nancy, trusting the soldiers wouldn’t shoot into *the mass of children* where their little experiment child is at; The pale man holds his hand up in a fist, stopping them.

“You really think you can just take her and leave? Where are you going to go?” The man- *scientist*, god this was some Scooby Doo bullshit- asks in the same voice, like he didn’t have a teenage girl holding a gun on him. Like they’re being silly. “You think we can’t find you? Your parents? You think we don’t know about your friend Barbara, about Will Byers?”

Jonathan’s voice turns soft when he crouches down next to Eleven, and she’s still blinking dazedly, blood coming from her nose and her heart sounding so thready and weak in Steve’s ears, like someone tapping a spoon inside of a porcelain teacup. He’s a bit blown away by this not-creepy Byers, who scoops one hand under the tattered ruffles of pink skirt and the other under the girls back, lifting her easily into his arms; And then he’s reminded that there’s a littler Byers when Jonathan doesn’t look awkward at all, with an armful of kid.

For a minute Steve thinks the scientist is going to say something about knowing about *him*, and his stomach falls. But although his eyes linger on Steve with the bat, menacing as well as he can like he’s going to fuck someone up, he doesn’t say anything. Simply smiles all cold, like a reptile.

Doesn’t really get a *chance* to say anything, actually, because suddenly the wall behind him opens, and the demigorgon lurches out screaming.

#####

## 4. Chapter 4

#####

The kids scream, and Nancy and Steve step backwards in shock.

He doesn't know what Byers is doing because he's dead silent, and Steve's too focused on the monster in front of him to turn and check, and honestly not overly concerned. Whatever Byers is doing, it's behind Steve and on the other side from the monster, so *Byers is low on his list of concerns.*

Nancy lets out an involuntary scream as the mouth thrusts forward out of the fleshy, pulsing gate growing out of the wall, slashing its way free with wet sounds and a rattling growl. Steve probably screams a little bit too. The kids are a chorus of shrieks and swearing that's pretty blue, coming from a bunch of thirteen year olds.

He can see wounds still on its head and shoulders, smell the decaying rot of the dried ichor caking the bites that Steve left torn out of its neck and clawed out of its torso while his eyes narrow in focus with adrenaline. The noise in the hallways is deafening, squeaking boots and clicking metal and screaming. There's a noise like static coming from the hole in the wall, a terrible hissing that makes Steve's whole sinus cavity and ears buzz painfully, like a television left on white noise.

It frees itself from the wall, pausing a moment like that thing from that *Alien* movie; Turning it's head and rumbling. Scenting the air. Steve's cold with fear, hands sweaty on the bat and fingertips numb. His sneakers don't even squeak, he's so still.

It's eyeless face turns suddenly, cocked like a birds, and Steve has the horrible feeling it's looking right at *him*, hissing in it's throat and clacking it's long claws at the end of it's arms like knives, before it takes a step forward.

This seems to jar the soldiers into action.

Steve moves too; He grabs Nancy and *books* it.

The smell is disgusting, and Steve gags as he starts to drag Nancy by the arm, towards the scrambling screaming kids and wide eyed Jonathan. She fires off a few shots into the creature one handed with her arm stretched out behind them, the sound lost amongst the chatter of automatic rifle fire, and her hand jerking with the kick. It doesn't sound like the movies, a steady burst. Instead it's like brief blats of sound, ringing Steve's ears as hey swiftly leave the men behind.

The dark smell of offal fills the hall, screams and arcs of light swinging wildly in front of them as they all sprint around the corner. He can hear wet rips and splashes, like a balloon fight, and he wishes not for the first time he didn't have freak-senses. Wished he couldn't hear the blood pour sluggishly from someone's neck, and patter to the floor like the leaky shower head in his dark porcelain bathtub. His hand slips down Nancy's arm to her hand, and she clings back with sweaty fingers, heedless of his claws and the way he probably holds too tight, the way he's making a guttural nervous sound in his throat that's pretty close to growling.

The closest he's come to being this fucked up, this out of control, was when he was little and confused. After that, it took falling out of a tree and breaking his arm when he was fourteen to pop his claws and make little growls and whimpers, nose buried in sweet grass in his backyard. He thinks this probably matches up- Along with getting his head beat in by Byers.

Jonathan almost stumbles ahead of them, sneakers squeaking on tile, before catching himself in his run. Eleven stares over his shoulder at Nancy and Steve, eyes big and blood snaking down out of her nose and face grimy with dirt. Then she looks past them, behind, and she looks vaguely surprised. Like a picture of someone who just escaped a house fire, or a famine.

But then she looks pissed, a dark curve to her mouth that makes Steve shiver.

The monster roars behind them, a guttural moaning howl that echoes hauntingly off of the metal lockers. The kids come to a sliding halt, wrenching open a door and ushering a panting, red faced Jonathan in. He ducks sideways to get Eleven in as well, and it's only now Steve notices one of her shoes are missing, a bare frilly sock he thinks might be one of Nancy's dangling stained and smudged on her little foot as the two of them disappear into the classroom.

"Come on, Nancy!" Mike yells, the last one in, all big dark hair and doe eyes, just like his sister.

Steve feels his heart ache at the sight. It's a reflexive uncontrollable feeling, even if most of the time he wants to drown little Wheeler in a fucking toilet. Nancy sprints ahead, letting Steve's hand go. She grabs Mike's shoulder instead, and drags him in with her, half in a head lock which would be hilarious under any other circumstances; But not when they're both wet eyed and scared. She has the gun held carefully off to the side, and Steve wishes she'd put it away so he wouldn't be so *conscious* of it all the time.

He catches the door, turning to look down the hall, heart pounding hard enough he has to concentrate on calming it long enough to listen, breath coming short. The kids start yammering behind him immediately, and there's a smash of glass as Byers sweeps lab equipment off a desk and lays Eleven carefully on it, murmuring comfortingly in that sorta sweet tone. Not serial killery at all. Steve's astonished all over again.

"*Shut it.*" He snaps, waving his hand crazy behind him, and the voices fall into reluctant silence. Maybe startled by the edge in his voice, a burring buzz like a growl, although he knows he's not turned around, so they can't see the heavy teeth in his jaw, or the flash in his eyes.

The hall way's silent too.



It smells heavily of blood, and the sour scent of fear rolling through the open door behind him in a cloud. With the AC out along with the power, the smells hang in a pallor long after they should've been swept away by sterile smelling air. The scent of a middle school is lost under the charnel smell of gore, and the sickening hair-raising smell of the monster that hangs heavy and clinging like something rotten in a fridge. The lights are dimmed, emergency lighting from the fire exits bright enough against the white painted walls and lockers that Steve can easily see the shadows cast from the hallway they just came from.

He strains himself, pulse thudding and throat clicking drily while the kids breathe loud and sticky behind him; Until he hears a slow rattle of a growl, and the faintest click of claws on tile.

Steve shuts the door as quiet as he dares, sliding the lock clockwise and home with a *snick*, backing away. Wonders if the thing can hear as well as he can, when he can't see any ears on it.

When the click of claws gets closer, he grabs the closest heavy work table one handed and drags it over, scraping across the tile while the kids hiss out a chorus of "SHH!" "*Oh my god we're going to die-*" "*Shut up! Harrington'll be eaten first-*" The adrenaline makes it easy, although he knows it probably weighs close to a hundred pounds.

Steve pushes it home in front of the door, and braces himself against it to free a hand, and throw Byers the bat. Despite the suddenness he catches it, and looks at Steve uncertainly. Steve rolls his eyes, and jerks his heads towards the kids, before miming making a claw, and a snarl. *I don't need it*, he doesn't say out loud. Understanding dawns, and Jonathan nods instead of arguing any further, placing himself between the kids and the door.

The little black kid with a style that cracks him the fuck up (*Lucas*, Steve thinks his name is), has his slingshot ready. He looks so determined that Steve, again, would find this whole thing fucking *adorable* if they weren't about to die. Little doe eyed shit-head Wheeler, with his gloomy little face and mop of dark hair is at the table with Eleven, their hands clasped. He's being all sweet on her, getting their faces close enough even Steve can't hear what they're saying. The third is scrambling in drawers, opening and closing them

loud enough to make them all flinch.

“Steve,” Nancy’s standing next to Jonathan, her arms bare. She left her jacket in the hall, where it had been cushioning Eleven’s head. It’s probably fucking ruined, soaked in the gristly shredded remains left behind of the soldiers. “Get away from the door.”

Here’s the thing-

Steve’s not normal.

But, Nancy’s not normal, either. It’s part of what made Steve like her in the first place. Byers is *definitely* not fucking normal. The little girl, propping herself up onto her elbows, head bobbing like a baby birds while she blinks over at Steve?

She’s not normal.

Maybe being normals over fucking rated.

He doesn’t hear the monster come up to the door, but he’s ready for it anyway.

The monster breaks the door into splinters, the top half folding over and a hole opening under claws like they’re cutting through paper. Glass crumbles around the chicken-wire embedded in the window, tinkling to the ground at Steves feet. It shrieks and shoves its gore stained face the rest of the way in, the petals of it opening and shutting with less snapping, and more the sound of someone opening and closing an umbrella very fast. A very large, wet umbrella full of

teeth.

Nancy fires off a few shots as soon as it's head comes through, steady and precise, the rounds thudding into the thing and drawing more unearthly screams. One goes through a petal of its face, and gore splatters back as the thing retreats, rattling and wounded and Steve can see clean through the hole to the other side.

It retreats, but not far. He can hear it scraping around in the hall, growling, and even as he thinks this whole thing is fucking *insane*, he's toeing his sneakers off and kicking them across the room. His shirt is easier to strip out of, as embarrassed as he is to admit Byers is bigger than him.

"*What is he doing, IS HE CRAZY?*" Screams the funny looking kid with the hat, and Byers snaps at him to shut it, even as he looks just as concerned himself. Probably for different reasons than the kid is. He'd take the sweats off, but he doesn't want to have to get these kids more therapy than they're already going to need. Which is a *lot*.

"Steve, *no*-" Nancy's fumbling in her pockets for more rounds, sliding them home and trying to push him back with her shoulder at the same time, like she's going to stop him- And he's forced to physically pick her up by her elbows, and *shove* her back towards Byers with a warning snarl.

"Yes, just shut up and let me-"

"Nancy, *your boyfriend is crazy*-" Wheelers squealing, and Steve turns to snarl at him *too*-

Just as the monster breaks the door down completely.

The table flies back and glances off of his hip without something bracing it, throwing Steve onto the floor in a daze, with a sharp gritty pain in his side where it connected. He's glad he shoved Nancy back because it would've taken her goddamn head off.

He hears it stalk forward through the splintered door and glass shards, shouldering through because it's fucking *gigantic*, and Steve gets on his elbows in time to see it hunker forward, his vision blurry. It's head goes low, huffing wetly with black dripping from the countless bullet wounds in it's torso, red ropes of drool hanging from its teeth. It makes Steve sick to see, because it looks like they're not doing as much damage as they should be. Even the one in its face from nancy looks cosmetic, barely bleeding, just pulsing like a mouth.

The real damage is where his own teeth tore in, ragged flaps of skin and flesh hanging off of it's shoulder and it's neck causing the wet gurgle, that Steve realizes is a new feature it didn't have the first time it had burst through a wall. It doesn't seem to be healing like the bullets; The same goes for where Nancy's swing of the bat had connected, a ragged crater that still looked like it was sucking faintly.

Steve changes quick, kicking free of the sweats and the pain tearing through him like a full body knuckle crack. He thinks it sounds like one too, because Byers gives a shouted "*Harrington-*", of concern. But he ignores it, shaking his head and staggering to his feet, growling and snarling into a loud bark as the thing focuses on him, feeling hot and shaking and furious.

He knows it's looking at him now, the same way he'd known in the hall. It doesn't have eyes, but it's awareness is like a prickle on the back of his neck. A crawling, oily feeling on his skin like he needs a shower. It's cold like a spider, or a robot; Completely disinterested in anything but removing the danger between it, and it's food.

Steve feels a manic sort of glee at being considered dangerous to something that has him shaking in fear.

It sinks back on its haunches, claws coming down to rest on the floor with a sound like a cutlery drawer, and Steve braces himself to meet it's pounce, his own legs shaking and tense and he's going to *die*, so he won't even have time to worry about everyone knowing what a freak of nature he was-

A rock comes whistling from the side, and hits the demigorgon right in the head with impressive enough force that it jerks sideways.

The snap of elastic rings out a second later, and another hits, the demigorgon twisting to hiss at the kids-

Steve doesn't look a gift horse in the face.

He rushes forward with a skid of claws, latching on a second time as it bares its neck in distraction, this time towards the back of the collar. He's forced to twist himself around so his claws are lodged somewhere in its ribs as he clings onto it, snarling through the sudden bubbling of gore around his snout.

The texture of it is burnt and flaking, still recovering from the three of them lighting it on fire, and the thick viscous blood pooling out and splattering in arcs when the thing screams and thrashes makes it hard to breathe when it gets in his nose.

Steve doesn't make the same mistake twice, kicking back off of it and shaking his *own* self loose before the monster can do it itself, taking a chunk with him and letting it drop out of his mouth. He tries not to swallow, and the black runs through his teeth like a sieve to spatter onto the linoleum.

It turns and swipes at him in fury, gurgling and fast as a steel trap, but Steve's expecting it, skitters sideways and landing on his side to avoid it, scrambling across the floor with his tongue lolling out of his jaws in an anxious pant. It puts him between the wide-eyed kids and the door, and he turns to snarl and snaps back, making the thing jerk back in surprise.

*Yeah, back up motherfucker.*

There's a scuffling and an anxious burst of conversation behind him as the kids start ripping through drawers faster, but Steve's not worried, because he's between them and the monster. It's not important, whatever they're doing.

*What is important, is Byers stepping into his field of vision on his left, and swinging the bat like a fucking all-star going for a home run. He knocks*

*the demigorgon clean off of its feet and back towards the door- Impressive, considering the thing is nine fucking feet tall. The gristly thock has Steve pricking his ears in surprise, giving Byers an incredulous glance. (The full effect is probably lost without eyebrows.)*

*Jonathan doesn't look at him, giving the bat a twist that Steve gleefully recognizes as his own move, glaring at the thing with the same flat-eyed look he'd given Steve for a brief moment, when he was using his face as a punching bag.*

*Nancy shoots, staggering it with a bang, and Steve moves forward again. It's hard to get traction on the linoleum, and he loses his footing as the demogorgon jerks itself back from him with a tea kettle sound that he hopes is something like fear. His teeth scrape along its ribs instead of its collar, and he can't get a grip, gets too close to the claws.*

*It swings down and knocks him aside, and Steve yelps when he goes down in a tangle of middle school desks, crashing towards the back corner of the classroom.*

*The monster gasps a wet rattle, and the sounds of yelling forces Steve to his feet, shouldering the wreckage of the desk off of him. The reopened wound on his side drips through his fur, finally saturating it enough to pool underneath him and darkening the brown fur to almost black, tacky and matting together and throbbing. He wonders what the teachers are going to make of the garish dark streak he left on the floor, the paw prints tracked through it. Let alone the wreckage of the door and completely smashed worktable.*

*Byers steps forward and swings again, missing this time, but the monster moves back from his bellow of rage with a rattling cough, head ducked and bobbing. The kids are doing something behind him, Eleven in a huddle behind their tangle of limbs Steve notes in relief. Nancy is in front of them, trying to line up a shot and hands completely steady.*

*"Jonathan, Steve, back up!" Screams the funny looking kid, with the hat, and to Steve's surprise he does, circling quick as he can which is pretty fucking quick, getting to the left of them while Jonathan springs the opposite way, scrambling before the demigorgon can realize what's happening and start chewing on his legs. He didn't even know the kid knew his name, to be honest.*

*As soon as they're clear, the little girl is on her feet, stepping past the boys.*

*Steve growls, moving forward to block her because what the fuck-*

*But she waves a hand, and he goes skidding back towards the wall, claws squealing across the tile and snarling, leaving deep furrows. Byers gets the same treatment, bat clattering out of his hands and to the ground when he goes over on his back-*

*But Nancy lets her go, firing into the monster to empty the barrel, a metronome of bang, bang, bang- Until she clicks empty, and the little girl is standing under her elbow holding a liter glass container of something brownish. The jacket she's wearing is too big, and her skirt is torn at the hem. She wipes the blood away with the sleeve, and Steve recognizes that pissed off look on her face, glaring darkly over the denim of Byers shoulder.*

*"In its mouth, in its mouth!" Screams Lucas, and he lets another rock fly, causing the demigorgon to opens its mouth wide to rattle and roar at them, strings of goop stretching across it's maw that's completely pulverized from Nancy's bullets, and the automatic rifles from before. Claws paw at the air-*

*Eleven waves a hand, her right eye turning red as a vessel bursts in it, and Steve can hear the high pitched wine he heard before as the demigorgon is slammed back against the chalkboard, screeching and struggling. The lights flicker like crazy, a snapshot of it straining up towards the little girl and almost making it, air between it's back and the chalkboard, before Eleven makes another, harder gesture, and sneers. It slams back so hard the wall craters behind it, chips of blackboard and mortar crumbling down and around its thrashing feet.*

*The bottle in her hand floats up next to her, and almost as fast as the bullets Nancy had fired, it shoots into the demigorgons screaming open maw.*

*There's an immediate crunch of glass as it snaps wildly shut onto it, tearing at it like a crocodile-*

*And then a sizzling, terrible gout of black and red as it starts to spew blood and ichor, screeching. It's wet, almost no air getting into the thing's torso as steam spews up from it's mouth with shards of broken glass. It thrashes even worse than before, and Eleven grits her teeth, a smell like a thunderstorm building in the air and sending Steve's fur on end, bristling.*

*He's caught though; Not by the little girls weird ass psychic powers. By his own fear, shaking, because he thought he was going to die.*

*Steve's been scared of this thing for months, lurking in his town and sending him scurrying back from the energy lab like a scared puppy. Making him nervous, sleepless.*

*And it was finally dying. He can't look away.*

*The kids are cheering, crowding around a tentatively smiling Nancy, and jumping like crazy because they can't get close to Eleven, not while she's concentrating on holding the thing against the wall. She sneers at it while it gurgles, it's movement slowing and it's chest slowly caving in with whatever chemical the kids had dug out of a fucking middle school science lab, steam hissing out of it's mouth and up towards the ceiling. A few drops of pus-like black mixed with the grayed meat plop off of it and onto the floor underneath, sizzling into the linoleum and Steve thinks strangely that at least his claw marks and blood all over the floor won't be a problem in comparison.*

*After an endless moment, it stops thrashing, twitching limply, claws jerking like a spider that had curled up to die. Eleven drops it. He likes the look in her eyes, the darkly satisfied look of being the biggest baddest mother fucker in town. Steve misses that feeling, but he thinks he's feeling the echoes of it right now.*

*She drops a moment later, going to one knee and gasping in like she'd been holding her breath the whole time, and Steve smells a fresh rush of clean sweet copper as her nose bleeds freely all the way down to the collar of her dress. Some comes from her ears, staining the shoulder of the jacket, and he moves forward before she can go all the way down, bracing her against his side, and whining. He keeps her up while she sucks in air,*



*rattling and heart making it's teacup tapping in his ears when he lowers them down towards her ribcage.*

*He's... Never really interacted with someone like this before. Besides Nancy, not a few hours ago. And Byers, he guesses, the giant freak.*

*He's barely done this at all, barring his accidental freak outs when he was little.*

*Eleven gets a hand in his fur, breathing hard, and Steve feels all weird and protective or whatever. He's not sure why he's acting like this. Probably 'trauma', or something. But she's a little girl, who's bleeding and kind of crying a little bit, even though she's baring her teeth in satisfaction at the monster that's slumping to the ground, and Steve thinks;*

*Maybe this was her monster too. Just like it was his.*

*It's gone, they killed it, he wants to fucking howl about it like that Clash song before the singer says split. Wants to get his teeth in something else, tear it up. Kind of wants to fight Byers again, throw punches until they're beating the shit out of each other, and he's shocked to realize his tail's wagging faintly, ears pinned.*

*Geez, he's gotta get the fuck out of here.*

*But instead, he licks Eleven's ear, startling himself, and maybe her as well judging by how her fingers tighten in his fur. He gives a whine, like a dog or something, and she gives him a small shaky smile in return, lifting a hand to wipe her already browned and bloody sleeve under her nose.*

*"Gone."*

*Yeah, gone. He thinks, licking her again because why the fuck not. It cleans her up, and something in his chest rumbles in satisfaction. Kids probably never seen a dog before, because she looks shocked.*

*"Nancy, your boyfriend is licking Eleven!" Squeals Mike like a shit heel, and Steve growls faintly. He'd change back and pick the little turd up by the feet and bounce him off the floor, but he doesn't want his dick to hang out and traumatize a twelve year old girl or whatever.*

*"It's fine- Jesus." Nancy gets Mike in her death grip, clutching him to her*

*chest while he makes a whole production out of not really minding at all, huffing and crap and hugging her back. Byer's gets warily up to his feet, moving to go near the monster, and poke it with the bat.*

*"Don't touch it! Hydrochloric acid makes a very caustic vapor-" The weird little know it all kid is yapping, practically dancing around with excitement and adrenaline.*

*"Don't breath it, and Nancy, why is your boyfriend a flipping werewolf?!"*

*"I don't know! We just found out! Wait, what are you talking about, caustic vapor-"*

*"Oh good, Jonathan knows too? Great, why are we the last to find out-"*

*"I found out two hours ago you little twerp-"*

*"Nice." Her voice is quiet, flat. No music in it. Eleven lets her hands come up to play along his snout, gentle, where Nancy had put her hands earlier, and it feels nice. Steve is pretty tired, so he sits down on his haunches. From there it's easy to lay down, his muscles sore and Eleven sitting the rest of the way down with her skirt tucked under her. Easy to let her rub behind his ears, while Nancy argues the idiots into submission, and Byers helps.*

*Steve's tired. But this is probably the first time since August he hasn't been too scared and on edge to relax, and when Eleven runs careful, curious hands through the fur on his shoulders, he melts, tongue lolling out, and letting himself bleed on the floor while he waits for Nancy and Byers to decide on a plan of action.*

*He's not afraid. It's easy to let his eyes shut and rumble, while Eleven pets him with clumsy, unsure hands.*

## **Notes for the Chapter:**

And that's it! I really struggled with the last chapter a lot, but I'm going to put it up anyway with what I have, because I know if I spend too much time picking at it I'll end up hating it.

Thanks for reading! This is definitely going to be a

Harringrove series btw, so sorry if I misled anyone with the whole subtones of the OT3. (They might be in there as well, in a weird best-friends life partner trauma-survivor huddle of cuddling, because they're going to bust straight on through to their feelings if it kills them.) In this story I mostly put it in because I wanted it clear that Steve's confused angry thoughts about Jonathan's shoulders and great way with kids is definitely not straight lmao, even if he doesn't know it.

But Harringrove is definitely what inspired this in the first place, and this is just the preface. Thanks guys for reading!

Edit: I have some people complaining about tagging for Jancy for views? I assure you; I will never tag anything for views, because I don't know how. I'm too stupid. But if I tag something, it's because I think it might be a factor, and I want people to tag for it.

### **Author's Note:**

I wrote this in a few days with very little editing, so sorry in advance. Notice any errors feel free to point them out, and I know I don't reply a lot (I'm VERY SHY), but comments really mean the world to me. Especially people telling me what they want to see. (I have plans for this series that I'm really excited about but don't want to give away lol. It's already veered wildly from what I wanted originally.)